

THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

- When we reflect on the limitations and finiteness of the human mind, it is difficult to imagine a being who knows everything perfectly
- But this is what Scripture teaches about God...he knows all things past, present, and future...he has no limits in knowledge
- This truth has been a pillar of the Christian faith...God knows all things perfectly...nothing is hidden from him...nothing is forgotten by him...nothing escapes his notice...nothing takes him by surprise...he is never caught off guard
- He knows all things that can be known...all things that were...that are...that will be...and that possibly could be
- God has infinite knowledge at every instant...he never learns or forgets...in fact, God cannot learn because he already knows and has always known everything
- “To say that God is omniscient is to say that He possesses perfect knowledge and therefore has no need to learn. But it is more: it is to say that God has never learned and cannot learn.”¹
- “[God] knows all that can be known. And this He knows instantly and with a fullness of perfection that includes every possible item of knowledge concerning everything that exists or could have existed anywhere in the universe at any time in the past or that may exist in the centuries or ages yet unborn. God knows...all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all desires, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth...Because God knows all things perfectly, He knows no thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. He never discovers anything, He is never surprised, never amazed. He never wonders about anything nor (except when drawing men out for their own good) does He seek information or ask questions. God is self-existent and self-contained and knows what no creature can ever know – Himself, perfectly...Only the Infinite can know the infinite.”²
- “If God be present everywhere, he must needs know what is done everywhere.”³
- God has never learned anything...in fact, to think of a God who has to sit at the feet of a teacher is to think of a being other than the God of the Bible

THE ATTACKS ON GOD’S OMNISCIENCE

- Sadly, in recent years the traditional understanding of divine omniscience has come under attack
- Traditionally, evangelical theologians have long held that history is not an unpredictable unfolding sequence of events that is moving forward haphazardly without purpose or direction
- Instead, it has been held that God knows the future and directs the course of world history toward his foreseen ends

¹ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 55.

² Ibid., 56-57.

³ Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 447.

- Furthermore, that God knows the future is central to the underlying prophetic theme found in Scripture
- For God to make prophecies concerning the future requires that he also possesses complete knowledge of the events leading to the fulfillment of those prophecies
- The understanding of God presented in the OT is that of a God who foreknows the future and can disclose it to his prophets
- Thus, orthodox Christianity has long understood God's omniscience to encompass all future events, including those free choices made by humans
- However, challenges to this traditional understanding of God's omniscience have come in recent years from the process theology camp, largely in the form of open theism
- Believing that God is in a constant state of change or process as it relates to human, these neotheists have retained some of classical theism yet have rejected much in favor of the concept of a gradually improving God
- They disagree with classical theism's belief in a simple, immutable, nontemporal, purely actual, and fully omniscient God
- They say that God does not know things that cannot (in their opinion) be known, such as the free acts of people that have not yet occurred, because these future free decisions are not there to know until they occur
- These theologians, most of whom are from the Arminian camp, "deny that God is able to know what choices individual human beings will make in the future...Ultimately it also means that God is ignorant of all future human choices, which means that he does not even know what the stock market will do tomorrow, or who will be elected as the next president of the United States, or who will be converted."⁴
- In taking this position, they have redefined omniscience as "knowing everything that is logically knowable" where "logically knowable" excludes future human choices because they can't even be known by God since they are not yet settled in reality
- Richard Rice explains this position: "God's experience of the world is open rather than closed. God's experience does not consist of one timeless intuition. He does not have one eternal perception of all reality, past and future. Instead, He responds to developments and changes in the world as they occur. Accordingly, God is open to new experiences and receives new stimuli. He continuously assimilates new data...Events enter His experience as they happen, not before. This means that God experiences the past and the future differently. They are not the same for Him. He remembers the past exhaustively, in all its detail. Every aspect is vividly present to His mind. But His experience of the future is different...[T]he future retains its essential indefiniteness from God's perspective as well as ours."⁵
- Those who reject that God is omniscient do so on the basis that "the future would be fixed and determined, much as is the past. Total knowledge of the future would imply a fixity of events. Nothing in the future would need to be decided. It also would imply that human freedom is an illusion, that we make no difference and are not responsible."⁶

THE EXTENT OF GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

Perfect Self-Knowledge

- God knows himself perfectly...he possesses complete and full knowledge of himself

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 348.

⁵ Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will* (Minneapolis MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 25.

⁶ Clark Pinnock, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, 121.

- The three persons of the Trinity know each other fully, without any gaps in their understanding of one another

Matthew 11:27 ~ All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

John 10:15 ~ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

- Even though we will never fully fathom the fullness of God's thoughts, he knows them perfectly

1 Corinthians 2:10-11 ~ For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

Perfect Knowledge

- God knows everything as it truly is...he never learns anything new
- Nothing ever surprises God or catches him off guard...he is not prone to confusion or misunderstanding
- There is no darkness or limitation in God's knowledge

Job 37:16 ~ Do you know about the layers of the thick clouds, The wonders of one perfect in knowledge,

1 John 3:20 ~ in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things.

- In fact, God is so perfect in knowledge that he is the pattern and source of all knowledge from which others merely borrow

Superior Knowledge

- God is infinitely above his creation in all knowledge and understanding
- When compared to the knowledge of God, human knowledge is near zero

Job 38:2-7 ~ Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? 3 Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! 4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, 5 Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? 6 On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, 7 When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Psalms 147:5 ~ Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.

Isaiah 55:8-9 ~ 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts'

Eternal Knowledge

- Human knowledge is gained over time, through a process of maturity and a succession of experiences which continually add to our understanding
- Humans can forget what they know
- But God has known all things from before the foundation of the world and this knowledge continues eternally...his knowledge never changes or grows
- God not only knows the outcome of history, he is also familiar with every human thought and action throughout history

Isaiah 46:8-10 ~ Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. 9 Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’

Immediate Knowledge

- God knows all things instantly and simultaneously...he sees all things in one instant...he is always fully aware of everything...he always knows all things at once
- Every bit of God’s knowledge is always fully present in his consciousness
- He has never needed anyone to counsel or instruct him about anything

Isaiah 40:13-14 ~ Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? 14 With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, And informed Him of the way of understanding?"

Romans 11:33-34 ~ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?

- “Among our limitations is our inability to fix our attention on more than one thing at a time. We flatter ourselves about our capacity to ‘multitask,’ when in reality what our eyes, ears, and attention are doing is moving rapidly from one thing to the next and back again. God, by way of contrast, is able to know all things comprehensively at once. His attention is fixed on everything at the same time, and not on one thing more than another...he knows all things distinctly, infallibly, immutably, and perpetually. He knows the whole story, the good and the bad, the public and the private, the outward and the inward.”⁷

Exhaustive Knowledge

- To his knowledge nothing can be given or added...nor can anything be taken from it
- God’s knowledge encompasses even the minutest details of our lives

Psalm 139:16 ~ Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.

Psalm 147:4 ~ He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them.

Isaiah 40:26 ~ Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, Not one of them is missing.

Matthew 6:8 ~ So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Matthew 10:29-30 ~ Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

- God knows every detail about our lives and there is nothing that we can hide from him

Penetrating Knowledge

- God’s knowledge extends to the depths of the human heart
- He knows us even more intimately and fully than we know ourselves

⁷ Terry Johnson, *The Identity and Attributes of God*, 66.

Job 28:24 ~ For He looks to the ends of the earth And sees everything under the heavens.

Psalm 139:1-4, 6 ~ O LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. 3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all...6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it.

Hebrews 4:13 ~ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Future Knowledge

- God knows the future as fully as the past since he sees all of time as one eternal present
- He knows the future because he has ordained whatever shall come to pass

Psalm 33:11 ~ The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart from generation to generation.

Proverbs 19:21 ~ Many plans are in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.

Isaiah 14:24 ~ The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, "Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand,

Isaiah 25:1 ~ O LORD, You are my God; I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name; For You have worked wonders, Plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness.

- "God not only knows whatsoever has happened in the past in every part of His vast domains, and He is not only thoroughly acquainted with everything that is now transpiring throughout the entire universe, but He is also perfectly cognizant of every event...that ever will happen in the ages to come. God's knowledge of the future is as complete as is His knowledge of the past and the present, and that, because the future depends entirely upon Himself...Nothing relating to the future is in anywise uncertain so far as the actualization of God's counsels are concerned. None of His decrees are left contingent either on creatures or secondary causes."⁸
- "If God did not know all future things, he would be mutable in His knowledge. If He did not know all things that ever were or are to be, there would be upon the appearance of every new object and addition of light to His understanding and therefore such as change in Him as every new knowledge causes in the mind of a man or as the sun works in the world upon its rising every morning, scattering the darkness that was upon the face of the earth. If He did not know them before they came, he would gain a knowledge by them when they came to pass which He had not before they were effected; His knowledge would be new according to the newness of the objects and multiplied according to the multitude of the objects. If God did know things to come as perfectly as he knew things present and past, but knew those certainly and the others doubtfully and conjecturally, He would suffer some change and acquire some perfection in His knowledge when those future things should cease to be future and become present; for He would know it more perfectly when it were present that He did when it was future, and so there would be a change from imperfection to a perfection. But God is every way immutable."⁹

⁸ Arthur W. Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1975), 19.

⁹ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 279.

Possible Knowledge

- God knows not only the reality of all that is, but also the possibility of others things that might have been
- He is fully aware of the potential consequences of every possible human action that ever could have been taken

Matthew 11:21, 23 ~ Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes...23 And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

- “If God fully knows himself, he knows everything he is able to do, which includes all things that are possible. This fact is indeed amazing. God has made an incredibly complex and varied universe. But there are thousands upon thousands of other variations or kinds of things that God could have created but did not. God’s infinite knowledge includes detailed knowledge of what each of those other possible creations would have been like and what would have happened in each of them!”¹⁰

THE IMPLICATIONS OF GOD’S OMNISCIENCE

It is Convicting

- The omniscience of God should elicit terror in the heart of anyone who does not know him
- There is no secret place where anyone can hide from God...a God who thoroughly knows us is unsettling and it fills us with uneasiness

Job 34:21 ~ For His eyes are upon the ways of a man, And He sees all his steps.

Psalms 33:13-15 ~ The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men; 14 From His dwelling place He looks out On all the inhabitants of the earth, 15 He who fashions the hearts of them all, He who understands all their works.

Psalms 90:8 ~ You have placed our iniquities before You, Our secret sins in the light of Your presence.

Proverbs 5:21 ~ For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths.

Proverbs 15:3 ~ The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good.

Jeremiah 16:17 ~ For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes.

Hosea 7:2 ~ And they do not consider in their hearts That I remember all their wickedness. Now their deeds are all around them; They are before My face.

- Sadly, many people live as if they don’t believe God really knows their sinful ways
- They think their iniquities are hidden from God’s sight...they have deceived themselves into thinking that they have successfully avoided his all-searching eyes
- But, no one should for a moment think that they can hide from an all-knowing God
- He knows the hearts of all men...he knows those whose sin remains unconfessed...he knows those who have put up an external façade...he knows all that is known about us

¹⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 191.

- God knows all the facts...and his judgment will be just and accurate because it will be according to the truth
- And there will come a day when the sin that is now hidden will be unmasked and punished

Ecclesiastes 12:14 ~ For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

- “In the divine omniscience we see set forth against each other the terror and fascination of the Godhead. That God knows each person through and through can be a cause of shaking fear to the man that has something to hide – some unforsaken sin, some secret crime committed against man or God. The unblessed soul may well tremble that God knows the flimsiness of every pretext and never accepts the poor excuses given for sinful conduct, since He knows perfectly the real reason for it.”¹¹
- “Lord, how terrible is Thine omniscience for Thine enemies. That eye which burns in heaven as a flame of fire is always upon them. They would fain flee away from it, but they are never able.”¹²
- “...men and women fear...exposure, for they are ashamed of what is there to be seen – by other people and by God. With others there are always ways to achieve a covering. We wear clothes, for example. On the psychological level, we carefully guard what we say so that only those things about us that we wish to be known are known. Sometimes we put on a false front entirely. But what are we to do in regard to God before whom ‘all hearts are open, all desires known’? There is nothing to be done. Nothing can be done. Consequently, it is an awareness of the knowledge of God, as well as his sovereignty and holiness, that produces anxiety and even dread in fallen women and men.”¹³
- Yet, even for us as believers, God’s omniscience is convicting since he knows when we play the hypocrite and when our piety is self-serving
- God sees through every external façade and hypocritical front
- He knows every heart and nothing will deceive him, not even an outward display of religion
- We may try to fool other people about what we’re really like, but we cannot fool God

It is Comforting

He Knows the Worst About Us and Yet has Loved and Saved Us

- Even though he knows every detail about us, he still loves us

Psalms 103:14 ~ For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.

Romans 5:8 ~ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

- Nothing can happen that isn’t already known to God...so we don’t need to fear that something within us will rise up and startle God
- “And to us who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope that is set before us in the gospel, how utterly sweet is the knowledge that our Heavenly Father knows us completely. No talebearer can inform on us, no enemy can make an accusation stick; no forgotten skeleton can come tumbling out of some hidden closet to abash us and expose our past; no unsuspected weakness in our characters can come to light to turn God away from us, since He knew us utterly before we knew Him and called us to Himself in the full knowledge of everything that was against us.”¹⁴

¹¹ Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, 57.

¹² Andrew Murray

¹³ James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 137.

¹⁴ Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, 57.

He Knows Everything We are Facing

- He knows and cares for us as no one else can

Psalm 56:8 ~ You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?

Psalm 139:1-4 ~ O LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. 3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.

Psalm 139:12 ~ Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.

John 2:24-25 ~ But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, 25 and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

- “But for Thy people, Thine omniscience is a comfort and a refuge. Thou art He who can help them against themselves and the deceitfulness of their own hearts. They invite Thine omniscience to search their heart and to cleanse them from their secret faults.”¹⁵
- God’s omniscience is truly a benefit and a comforting reality for the believer
- He knows our hearts...even when others misjudge us or misread our intentions...we can find comfort in the fact that He knows all

Psalm 139:1-2 ~ O LORD, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar.

Isaiah 66:18 ~ For I know their works and their thoughts; the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory.

- God’s complete knowledge of the heart certainly proved beneficial for Peter

John 21:15-19 ~ So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” 16 He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “**Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.**” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep. 18 “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.” 19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me!”

- After trying twice to convince Christ that he loved him, Peter then appealed to Christ’s omniscience
- Even though he had previously denied Christ three times, he was confident that the all-knowing God knew what was really in his heart
- For this reason, we can ask the Lord to search our heart

Psalm 139:23-24 ~ Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; 24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

- The reality of God’s omniscience brings comfort in every situation...he has never forgotten us!

¹⁵ Andrew Murray

- We must never think that our way is hidden from God
- “His compassions to pity us, his readiness to relieve us, his power to protect and assist us, would be insignificant, without his omniscience to inform his goodness and direct the arm of this power...without this knowledge of his, no comfort could be drawn from any other perfection.”¹⁶

He Knows What He is Going to Make of Us

- He knows what he is doing in order to make us like Christ and conform us to his image

Romans 8:29 ~ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

Philippians 1:6 ~ For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

- Even when we falter in our sanctification, God is not discouraged with us
- He knows all of our failures and victories...and even when it seems like the failures outweigh the victories, God knows that our ultimate destiny is Christ-likeness

It Encourages Prayer

- Since God knows ahead of time what we will ask for in prayer, we are not actually telling God anything that he doesn't already know
- So, in prayer, we are not actually bending God's will to ours because we are not supplying God with any additional information
- In reality, prayer helps to line up our desires with God's will...and it pleases him because it is an act of obedience to his Word

THE OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

- Doesn't God promise to forget our sins?

Isaiah 43:25 ~ I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins.

Response: This doesn't mean that God has forgotten them, but rather that he won't let them play a part in how he relates to us

- Doesn't God's omniscience infringe on our choices being "free?"

Response: Divine compatibilism states that when people perform free acts (i.e. not constrained or compelled in their actions), they do that which God wants them to do. His omniscience is compatible both with human freedom and responsibility (i.e. Micah 5:2; Acts 2:23).

¹⁶ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, 508.